

# GLOBALIZATION, CONFLICT OF VALUES AND CONTINGENT IDENTITY

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## 1 An ambiguous "present"

Universalism and difference, equality and otherness, have for some time now formed a strange couple not only within political and moral philosophy, but also in sociology. One of the leading reasons for the recent resurgence of ethics seems to be represented by the coexistence of processes of "globalization" and the proliferation of intercultural conflicts deriving from the resurgence of "identity politics". But opinions are divided regarding the nature of relations within this apparently opposed couple, opening the way for the most varied and heterogeneous interpretations and for improvised and inconsistent hermeneutics. If we are to tackle this sensitive issue in terms which are anything but elusive, what is most needed is a philosophical reflection upon the present - our present.

But approaching the present from the point of view of a philosopher does not necessarily involve talking about philosophy - about topics which are strictly philosophical. As the whole set of experiences which may be classed as "Modern" has gradually been developing, the world of the philosopher has exited from its orbit and started to affect that dimension to which we refer as "contemporaneity," a dimension which at the same time involves and eludes us, engages us and slips away. And from that moment on it is also possible - and indeed, in a certain sense, necessary - to be "untimely" (in Nietzsche's sense of being slightly ahead.

of one's own time) But it is precisely for this reason that we cannot avoid referring - albeit if only in a polemical or radically negative fashion - to the present.

I will, nevertheless, approach "contemporary relevance" by setting out from a precise point of view defined by the concept of difference, without losing sight of the longitudinal split which seems to mark our period - not to mention the extremely rapid obsolescence and semantic rarefaction of the slogans coined in the exercises of academic advertisement of the post-modernists.

I will define this longitudinal fracture in terms of a double injunction, of a conflictive coexistence or cohabitation of two imperatives: the imperative of a-topia (the "non-places" to which the anthropologist-of-everyday-life, Marc Augé, has recently referred) and that of belonging (the compensatory need for community identity manifested in the claiming of stable places and dwellings). This is not an alternative, but an "interfacial" relation of two sides of the same coin.

This is what I will shortly attempt to demonstrate. In the meantime, to dwell a little longer upon the question of places and non-places, it would be as well - in measuring the problems which are to be tackled - not to neglect the scale of the morphological-historical differences between the great geo-

cultural areas of the planet "North America", Michel Serres once observed, "has roads but no places, that is, places which are man-made a space through which one passes China has the deepest of places, but it doesn't even have the slightest path it is a land in which one stays put, an immense place. In Europe, we have places, roads and paths. At least until such a time comes when the paths which make up the places are not substituted by roads which destroy them".

But there is still a general aspect which should be borne in mind, if we do not wish the debates on the "decline of ideologies", the "crisis of foundations", "drifting" and the "loss of centre", which have marked the atmosphere of recent years in Europe and in the United States, to degenerate into pseudo-sociological banalities such aspect affects the Constant which is present in all the phases, all the innumerable metamorphoses of the conceptual vocabulary of power in the West, and which is represented by its symbolic space (and code).

The essential lexicon with which we indicate power in the West is composed of pairings of two elements violence and perimeter, vitality and geometry, energetics and topology. From this point of view, the history of power and the history of metaphysics really do coincide albeit in a much more prosaic sense than that suggested by the path of thought which may be traced from Heidegger to Derrida. The two histories overlap only insofar as they are variants of the same identity logic, only insofar as they are complementary ways of denominating the centre, different ways of bringing together the two constituent co-ordinates of self-reference identity and borders, vitality and spatiality, "spirit" and "form". The determination of a turning point, of a fracture within metaphysical substantialism, has then suggested that the centre is not a fixed point but a ubiquitous function which cannot be located an a-topon, indeed a non-place, a central meaning which is never present in an absolute sense, outside of a system of differences.

We must now ask ourselves what the consequences are of such a breach for the logic of power and identity This question immediately projects us to the heart of the problem which I have set out to address.

This is a study which is formulated - as I noted at the beginning -from the point of view of difference a category whose relevance I intend to uphold not only with respect to the logic of identity, with the identity-based "logos" of hegemonic universalism, but above all against the differences stressed by the multiculturalist climate of today. This study will touch upon four areas in rapid sequence borders, values, language and technology I will examine them individually, attempting in each case to give an idea of their network of connections and internal concatenations.

## **2 Borders**

How can the question of borders be viewed today, since the collapse of the apparatuses of threat

and protection (apparatuses which are thus symbolically ambivalent) of the bipolar World-system? Let us immediately declare that we are in agreement with those authors (from Claudio Magris to Hans Magnus Enzensberger) who have characterized the problem in the following terms with the falling of the visible external walls - the strategic bastions - inner walls have sprang up, the invisible walls from which are produced not only crises of conscience or new friend-enemy aggregations, but from which the tormented ghosts of ancient hostilities also arise - as if they derived from archaic stratifications, from the remote depths of history Ethnic hatreds which are keen, irreducible and - I fear - too long suppressed.

How, then, might we place ourselves in relation to the two contrasting diagnoses of our time the diagnosis which today sees the fulfillment of universal homologation and "the end of history", marked "a single brand of thought" and of "possessive individualism", of an omnivorous and undifferentiated market economy, and that which, on the other hand, emphasizes diversities, centrifugal forces, and the "clash of civilizations".

As I stressed earlier, I do not believe that we are obliged to choose between one or the other, or that these are mutually exclusive alternatives. Rather, I think that we have before us two half-truths today these are the two sides of the coin. The characteristic of our present, or rather of "that-which-we-have-before-us", may be defined in terms of the "glo-cal", that is of a fusing of global and local the phenomena of "globalization", facilitated by modernizing technology, with the growing interdependence and tendential homogenization of the various geo-cultural areas of the planet under the imperatives of competitiveness and innovation imposed by the world market, induce new phenomena of localization. It is therefore the same vector of de-territorialization which gives rise - in apparently a circle of paradoxical circle - to the proliferation of phenomena of re-territorialization, which translate into an exponential growth of demands for autonomy and identity-based belonging. We are thus experiencing a return of the community, of the small homeland, in all quarters. A "return" which is assuming different appearances in the two halves of the West, the old continent and the new. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, this return has found its concrete expression in Europe in the surge of ethno-politics, while in North America it is manifested in the proliferation of "politics of difference". In both cases, the notion of the individual (and of individual freedom) is becoming problematic. In order to grasp the nature of the phenomenon, we must not forget that what we refer to as "in-dividual" - i.e., an undivided subject possessing sovereign prerogatives of self-determination - is an event which is not only Western, but also specifically Modern it is the product of the long and bloody religious civil wars which prepared for the advent of the "great Leviathan" in Europe between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the advent of the secular state based on an apparatus of sovereignty and on strictly "neutral" legal procedures. We must therefore agree upon the meaning to be attributed to the expression "the return of the community". Although it is expressed as a nostalgia for origins, this "return" - precisely insofar as it emerges as a request for "compensation for damages" from modernity and as a search in compensation for the

warmth of the community, in the face of the "Big Chill" of the purely procedural institutions of our democracies - is not really a repeat, a pure and simple re-run of the past, but a claim which is subsequent to the modern individual, post-Leviathan, subsequent to the neutral styling of political association into a "big body" composed of individuals or atoms, of indivisible monads isolated from one another.

If we wished to adopt more technical formulae, such as those familiar in the contest between the liberal camp and the communitarian camp which dominated the philosophical-political scene throughout the 1980s (or in the ambiguous debate which followed it around "multiculturalism", or in the mounting populist come-back), then we would have to specify that the essential content of all these challenges signifies, in the current crisis of the Leviathan, the return to the overturning of those conflicts of identity - and of those options of irreducible value - which originally paved the way for the advent of the modern state even though the latter subsequently managed to neutralize them, declassifying them as mere conflicts of interest.

And this brings me to the second part of my argument.

### **3 Values**

Our present is not a time of ethics in dialogue, but a time of ethics in conflict. The conflict-breeding - and thus, necessarily, far from edifying - implications of the current centrality of the ethical dimension now seem to have been acquired on a double terrain on the terrain of (a) philosophy, and on that of the (b) political government of complex societies which are both multi-media and multi-cultural. It is a good idea to stop, if only for an instant, and examine these two aspects one at a time, viewing them in their specificity and autonomy. Then - and only then - we may measure the extent of their interdependence.

(a) At a strictly philosophical level, we may now see the growth not only of widespread dissatisfaction with utilitarian models of rationality, but also of the idea of an "incommensurable exclusivity" (to take up an expression of Bernard Williams') between value imperatives which are tragically incompatible, however rationally consistent they may be in themselves. This idea strikes at the heart of the utilitarian paradigm, insofar as the latter necessarily presupposes the axiom according to which there is a single, exclusive model of rational behaviour of "social agents and actors" - with the consequence that any conflict of value might in the last analysis be reduced to a case of logical inconsistency. In short for utilitarians it is really difficult to imagine that a rational subject might remain rational without following the "economic" criterion of rationality, based on the calculation of costs and benefits. An agent or actor who does not proceed according to this strictly strategic and instrumental logic is logically inconsistent, or simply irrational, insofar as his vision of reality (and of his own interests) is fundamentally flawed by, for example, prejudices, ideologies

and false beliefs.

(b) But the consequences of this anti-utilitarian acquisition at a political level would seem to be no less decisive. Here we have the consideration of the presence, in our western societies, of ethical imperatives or normative points of view in mutual conflict, but all equally plausible and - what is most important - which cannot be lumped together under a single (rationally and universally valid) parameter of procedural fairness or justice. The irreducibility of the conflict of values to some "metrics of interests" or other undermines the model of the Contract as conceived by modern political philosophy. This has been noticed by John Rawls himself, who, twenty years after *A Theory of Justice* (1971), radically revised his neo-contractualist programme in *Political Liberalism* (1993) by advocating a theory of overlapping consensus.

In an important discussion with Jurgen Habermas which appeared in "Journal of Philosophy" in March 1995 (vol XCII, no 3, pp 109-180), Rawls openly declares his own renunciation of the claim to derive the model of the "well-ordered society" from the hypothesis of an "original position" and attempts to circumscribe the notion of "justice as fairness" within the realm of the "Political", meant as an area necessarily removed from the ideological-emotional storm of controversies between the different ethical options and Weltanschauungen (visions of the world). The strictly political conception of justice, / e, (an important parenthesis) "non-metaphysical", is therefore specified - in conformity with a maxim which is much more classical than even Rawls seems inclined to admit - as a sphere of neutralization of those "substantive" questions which are still used as a basis for a pluralism which is finally "taken seriously". However meaningful it may be, this new Rawlsian framing of the question nevertheless neglects some crucial questions – as Habermas noted, albeit in a different perspective - both at (i) the level of a practical perspective and (ii) at a more strictly theoretical level.

(i) At a practical level if the pluralistic-conflictive nature of the different perspectives of value and Weltanschauungen is such as to render problematic the question of the order of a democratic system (and such - let us add - as to impose a refraining of Rawlsian theory), then on the basis of what miraculous virtues might "political liberalism" be able to neutralize them in the no-man's-land of a "reasonable" cooperation?

(ii) At a theoretical level granting, for the sake of the argument, that political liberalism can limit itself to the "category of the Political" leaving "philosophy just as it finds it", won't it then be necessary for us to justify this claim in terms of an argument and a conception - and indeed a comprehensive one - according to which the constitution of the Political can avoid any and all philosophical foundation?

These are questions which obviously cannot easily be avoided if we are to construct a theory of democracy which is effectively equipped to tackle the challenge of the times.

Another influential American political philosopher has recently spoken of two powerful centrifugal forces which are now at work in the United States one is separating whole groups of the population

from a supposedly common centre, the other is affecting single individuals, cutting them off from the social fabric. Both of these movements of diaspora and distancing from the centre have their critics, who accuse the former of chauvinism or of regressive fundamentalism, and the latter of pure and simple selfishness. The argument between "liberals" and "communitarians" is therefore generating a crossfire of accusations while the liberals regard the separate cultural groups as closed, intolerant tribes, the neo-communitarian critics regard the separate individuals as lonely, rootless egoists. The conclusion of Michael Walzer (the latter are his observations) is that neither of these two criticisms is completely erroneous, but nor are they completely exact either. The reasons the two tendencies should therefore be made to interact is in order to aid a democratic politics which is open to centrifugal forces and capable of contemplating a plurality of "spheres of justice".

This solution is acceptable, but on two conditions. The phantasm of a "third way" must not be allowed back into circulation this was a solution already experimented between the two World Wars and - as we Europeans know only too well - strewn with dead bodies And we cannot avoid the politically more arduous problem of the split, which is in my opinion irrevocable, between citizenship and belonging. The modern democratic idea of belonging as being fully resolved in citizenship, an idea of Jacobin origin, is no longer sufficient to tackle the challenges of contemporary society. We now know that there are needs for symbolic identification which can never find full realization in the sphere of citizenship not even in its broadest imaginable or conceivable form. The possibility of answering social demands with a broadening of the horizon of citizenship (and the corresponding reinforcement of its apparatuses of inclusion) exists as long as one is dealing with political conflicts (over rights of equality), or with economic and social conflicts (conflicts of interests or status). But such possibility no longer exists once one is dealing with ethical conflict, the conflict of values.

The idea of a moral citizenship can certainly be affirmed in the abstract or be academically conjectured. But in reality it leads to the forcible imposition of a mutually exclusive choice between universalism and relativism of values. Accepting the first horn of the dilemma means assuming one set of morals as universally valid this is obviously only possible in the presence of a culturally homogeneous population firmly anchored in its own mores. Accepting the other horn of the dilemma, on the other hand, means "flexibilizing" the public sphere in order to render it more hospitable and open to the different groups, once the unsuppressible ethical-cultural dishomogeneity of the "citizens" has crystallized this is something which inevitably involves a radical revision of claims to universality in a pragmatics of order aimed at resolving conflicts between imperatives and points of view - destined to recur periodically - on each occasion that they crop up, in a manner which is balanced (but for that very reason also unstable).

*Tertium non datur* - can we conclude? It would seem so But the decisive point is another on neither of the two horns of the dilemma do we really have a broadening of citizenship in a moral direction.

On the contrary, we have a limitation and relativization of its ethical nature, whether implicit or explicit. As a consequence, the presumed or hoped for broadening of citizenship into moral citizenship generates the opposite effect in both of the alternatives considered either through its being anchored to "customs" of the dominant majority group (understood in the double sense of moral styles and standards of behavior), or through a relativistic readiness to accept the "rationales" of the different cultural groups present in the population, compensating and neutralizing them reciprocally. This situation of theoretical and practical stalemate would seem to be the conclusion of a strictly politico-logical consideration of relations between universality and difference. We may therefore exclude any examination of the premises (cultural, ethical and, in the last analysis, metaphysical) of politics itself.

Another path might be that of beginning from metaphysical foundations in order to get to the root of the symbolic conflict between citizenship and belonging. But the taking this path would necessarily mean being ready to address that theme of the irreducibility of difference, which Western universalism has never managed to conceive up until now - either in philosophy or in politics - outside of the metabolic apparatuses of neutralization offered by dialectic or relativism.

Thus, underlying this same thematic trajectory, there emerges a further problem. Is it really possible to elaborate the edifying idea of a multicultural citizenship without crossing through the great aporia of difference starting - to be sure - from sexual difference, but intending the latter, anti-essentialistically, as gender, i.e., as "socio-cultural construction" of the differences between the sexes (according to the suggestion of the most recent feminist thought)? And, at an even more general level is it possible today to reformulate the question of being-in-common without crossing right through those paradoxes of universalism which seem to be the same thing as the constitution of that quintessentially Western event, which we call "politics"?

At stake in the conflict which seems to threaten the roots of democratic theory is our capacity to answer this question (and the way in which we answer it) It is no coincidence that we are now witnessing the return to the limelight of a whole series of decisive ethical questions raised by the Enlightenment in its late phase and emerging in the last part of the eighteenth century through the conflict which places Herder, with his attention towards the historical dynamic of languages and cultures, in opposition to Kant's ethical universalism.

Kant's moral idea - Herder objected - is an ideal which is "existentially poor" It is a "transcendental" universal, precisely insofar as it transcends specific forms of life of human individuals, which are in reality always immersed in cultural contexts, in linguistic and symbolic networks which no single individual or group can do without. We may therefore certainly postulate a universal ideal. But the way in which concrete individuals acquire experience of those values is always culturally determined and - above all - mediated by language.

The different ways of saying, of nominating, an idea (like, for example, the idea of the good) or a value (like, for example, the values of freedom, of justice, of equality or of "equal opportunity"), do

make a difference with respect to the meaning of ideas and values, but they usually refer to irreducibly different experiences and symbolic nuclei. This brings me to the third aspect which I proposed to address.

#### 4 Language

Insofar as it is constituted by and in language, the self is not individual, un-splittable, but it is a multiple self. The idea that the individual person - Jon Elster has observed - may be regarded as, or is in effect, a set of relatively autonomous, sub-individual selves has a long history. Indeed, the common denominator of diverse contemporary philosophical tendencies such as communitarianism, deconstructionism and hermeneutics, is precisely this critique of the metaphysical, substantialistic premise of the modern subject. For the currents of thought which we have just mentioned, this premise translates, in politics, into a "supremacist" presumption, which would undermine the emancipational ideal of universalist individualism at its roots.

But we cannot do in politics something that we deny in philosophy. That is what regularly happens to those communitarianist and (albeit to a lesser extent) deconstructionist or hermeneutic critiques of modernity, which sometimes appear to pursue - with their denunciation of homologation and Anglo-American cultural-linguistic imperialism - the chimaera-like conception of an ethics of authenticity, entrusted to the incommensurable autonomy of "forms of life".

And yet, it is precisely the anti-substantialistic idea of an intrinsically multiple constitution of subjectivity through language which should have suggested the useless or pathetic character of the claim to criticize the worldwide imperialism of a language by "unmasking" the corruptions which it introduces into other languages. It is now many years since the publication of *Mille plateaux* (1980) - a work rich in points of interest but much neglected - in which Deleuze and Guattari laid bare the poverty of the critique of the purists against the influence of the English language: the academic or Poujadiste denunciation of "franglais". No language - they stressed - can be the "majority" language at a global level, except at the price of being ongoingly vernacularized or creolized by all the minorities of the world. That is what happened to Latin in late antiquity. It is now happening to English: American itself was not constituted, in its differences from English, without this linguistic work of minorities. For example, the differences which Gaelic and Irish English make to American, or the differences wrought by Black English and many other ghetto-idioms up to the point that New York is now a city without a language. Anyone familiar with German literature knows that Kafka, as a Jew from Prague, submits German to the creative treatment of a minority language. How? By creating a continuum of variations, negotiating all the variables in order to restrict the constants and extend the variations, by stretching vectors throughout the language in order to achieve heights, durations, timbres, stresses, intensities, or even shouts and cries.

unknown to Hochdeutsch, classical German Why on earth shouldn't what was true for the German of Prague not be true today of Black English or of Quebecois"). And yet...

And yet it would be as well to go back over the trajectory which has characterized our reasoning. The visible results of communitarianism include the emergence of one of the most insidious risks for our democracies the threat of a fundamentalism indigenous to the West Multicultural logic, if abandoned to its own pseudo-natural logic, ends up hardening into a system of "fortified" differences which, in spite of the much advertised politics of difference, act like differences in miniature monads or insular self-consistencies interested exclusively in tracing sharp borders of non-interference. How is it possible to dissolve this rigid non-interference clause, which apparently extends the idea of difference, but in reality confounds it, overturning it in fragmentation and mechanical proliferation of identity-based logic?

In order to attempt to provide an answer, it is necessary to project oneself beyond "contemporaneity", beyond the complicity of two only rhetorically contrasting positions that of the "technophobes" and that of the "technophiles", that of the new apocalypics and that of the new apologists of the miraculous virtues of the new communications technologies.

This brings me to the last phase of my argument.

## **5 Technology**

The polarization of those who see in the new technologies of multimedia communications undreamed of promises of redeeming horizontality, of a liberationally "interactive" diffusion of information, and those, on the other hand, who see in them a new dimension of domination, fragmentation and generalized control of "subjects", repeats, in its paralysing specularity, the traditional ambivalence of the Western attitude towards technology.

In order to escape from the vicious circle, it is certainly not enough to limit ourselves to repeating the distinction between the level of "pure" technology and the range of its possible "impure" uses. The truth is that this is a long-standing distinction, but in some of its aspects it is far from being obsolete in a democratic regime, as we have noted, nothing is more risky than the transparency of social relations, and it is precisely the telephone, a "horizontal" means of communication par excellence, which may turn into the most thoroughly permeating instrument of control. True. Nevertheless, we must make an effort in order to shift the focus of our attention onto a further point, which is actually the really decisive one onto the way in which a technology, before it is even used, is constructed. Technologies are not just prostheses, but languages, symbolic universes. As such they contain in themselves a metaphorical power in the literal sense of meta-pherein, to carry across, to transport experience from one form into another. At every "transportation" - from the wheel, the real big bang in the evolutionary history of *homo faber*, to sub-atomic accelerators, and

from the hand-written manuscript to the printed book and to Internet - the metaphorical virtualities of a technology sharpen some sides of the human sensorium, marginalize others and reduce them to a state of latency.

If we now examine the new technologies of multi-media communications, we cannot deny that they contain an extraordinary metaphorical power. The universe which they generate is the universe of a "reticular" technology, the power of control of which becomes effective only if all the given hierarchies are dismantled and deconstructed. It is therefore a power which, by definition, depends on its ability to reproduce itself in a process of incessant self-innovation.

The discussions of the juridical and political consequences of these "reticular" technologies (in which the so-called "human factor" is destined to play an ever growing role i.e., the ability of the human mind to adapt itself and conform to them) are certainly quite important, but they are "secondary" (in the sense that they have an importance of secondary order) compared to the crucial, "primary" problem, which affects the question of codes. In what is the power of "performativity" to be found? Who establishes the codes? How (and to what extent) is it possible to "negotiate" them?

With the proliferation of edifying hermeneutics, apologies for free translation and redeeming theories of a multimedia sphere "free-from-domination" - never has the need been felt more sharply for a critique of communication. In the present world, in the multi-verse in which we happen to live, our "redemption" cannot be entrusted to a (transcendental or hermeneutic) ideal of progressive "transparency" of intersubjective relations. Nor can we be redeemed by the "eccentric" self or the "nomad" subject, which are currently being debated by postmodernists and deconstructionists. If it is true - as the most recent products of the same post-analytic thought now suggest - that the individual self is, in spite of its etymology, a "divided self, and that the conceptual apparatuses developed in the study of inter-personal conflicts can therefore be applied to the analysis of intra-personal conflicts, it follows that in order to be able to inter-act effectively, we must be willing to risk the encounter - the "depaysement", the "unsettling" experience of otherness - in spite, even, of dialogue and in dialogue does it not emerge as primary that *peitho* - the persuasive reason at which the West has always excelled - which Sophocles, in *Philoctetes*, already attributed to Odysseus as the most refined and subtle form of *bria*, of violent stratagem?

But in order for this to happen, in order for the encounter, the de-centring and disorienting friction with otherness, to take place, it is necessary for each to assume - not with regard to others but with regard to oneself - the point of view of difference. It is always a Stranger who "makes me feel at home", who gives rise to myself as an identity.

But it is not enough to say that every identity - whether individual or collective - is made possible by a constitutive difference. It is not enough to take refuge in the formula "I am alien to myself". On the other hand, we must banish all temptation (so widespread in the "post-philosophical" spiritual exercises of our time) to resolve the critique of the "identity-based Logos" in a generic

"heterophilia" or - worse still - in a paradoxical "xenocentrism" attributing to the figure of the Other or of the Stranger all the redeeming prerogatives which metaphysical ontotheology once assigned to the all too familiar Subject. To classify oneself as marked by difference means taking a much more radical step it means assuming the ideas of border and contingency as positive - as an existential condition for the opening up of the range of possibilities.

The encounter with radical otherness can produce a comparing of effective experiences only insofar as each identity (from that of the individual to that of a political association or a culture) is aware of its own contingency. Saying contingent identity is not equivalent to saying "situated" existence. It is not equivalent to substituting the metaphysics of the One with the post-metaphysics of the Multiple the very optical-political power of the present technological apparatus - as highlighted by the post-feminist thought of Donna Haraway - should be enough to show how the passage from the old monological order, structured by ontic isolationism, to the new pluralistic and "relational" order of semiotically, sexually and culturally situated differences is very far from guaranteeing the defeat or weakening of the dominance of the "Neutral". To start from identity as contingent, rather means in the first place assuming "contingency" in the strictly philosophical sense of non-necessary existence, existence not justified by anything, but nevertheless not impossible existence situated, then, in a kind of *metaxy*, in a precarious ontological interlude between being and nothingness, necessity and impossibility And, in the second place, it means operating that change of perspective whereby existence includes the possibility that it could also not be, or that it could be completely "otherwise". In this way, and only in this way, the threshold is opened for that trans-evaluation of values which consists in connoting as positive the notions of precariousness and the border, transforming them from "lack" and ontological deficit into conditions of possibility and freedom. Only the contingent has essentially constitutive freedom the freedom of choice. Even the "actual" identity of each of us is nothing but the result of unrepeatable, or at least highly unlikely selections and bifurcations. Had we, at certain moments in our lives, been faced with other opportunities, or had we, in the face of crucial options, made a different decision from that which we actually made, then we would certainly be different from the people we are today. It is precisely because of this constitutive fragility manifested by each identity (whether of a person or of a collective subject, of a language or of a culture), precisely insofar as it is the result of a *cum-tangere*, of a non-linear series of particular and unrepeatable conjunctions, that it represents a precious asset to be safeguarded and treasured indeed, to destroy it or let it die would mean forever extinguishing a light, a viewpoint, a window on the world Post-analytic thought therefore limits itself to dissolving the question of identity in the simultaneous strata of the "multiple self (as in Elster) or in the successive series of a "self which diversifies itself over time (as in Derek Parfit), thus inadvertently making itself vulnerable to retaliation from the "deconstructionist" adversary. But our perspective aims to reconstruct identity logic as a historical contingency rendered finally accessible from the viewpoint of difference.

So only once we have grasped that freedom is the exclusive prerogative of the contingent identity, and the "otherwise" is the ontological modality proper to every existence, to our "being in the world", does an encounter between different experiences become possible under the aegis of difference. But this result also ends up decisively affecting the sense of our existential relation with the event and with the universe of technology. Only through the cipher of the "otherwise" are we made aware of the paradoxical status of normality which characterizes this hyper-modern period permeated by the metaphorical power of global communications technologies and marked by "cosmic exile", by the experience of a-topia and by universal uprooting.

But if it is true, as so many philosophers of Heideggerian descent repeat ad nauseam, that technology is a "destiny" - i.e., that it represents a point of no return and that no problem can be resolved by simply bringing its development to a halt - it follows that the moral position which conforms with the modality of the "otherwise" certainly cannot be that "ethics of authenticity" these days re-advocated by so many. In every ethics of the authentic - the logical outcome of which, extreme but consequent, can only be "ethnic cleansing" - there lurks not only an uncrossable frontier between "us" and "them", but also the explanatory key of the identity-based logos as symbolic apparatus of appropriation: the logic of the authentic coincides wholly and perfectly with the proprium, the domination of the Identical, which relates to the other only in strictly "patrimonial" terms.

"If there is one word which is inauthentic", Maurice Blanchot once observed, "it is without doubt the word 'authentic'". Our task, our responsibility towards the present, thus consists of going back to experience, to the increasingly paradoxical and "inauthentic" languages with which our experience is interwoven.

In technology as in science, and in politics as in ethics, this means no longer to pursue the woeful illusion of realizing the virtual, but to attempt, on the contrary, to virtualize the real - and thus to open up a new range of possibilities.